

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 EUR-12 EA-10 AF-10 EB-08 OMB-01 TRSE-00
/102 W
-----033324 172001Z /46

R 171837Z JAN 78
FM AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5738
INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

CONFIDENTIAL SECTION 1 OF 2 RIO DE JANEIRO 0243

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, BR
SUBJECT: REACTION IN RIO TO DESIGNATION OF GENERAL FIGUEIREDO

1. SUMMARY. OUR INITIAL SOUNDINGS OF REACTIONS TO GENERAL FIGUEIREDO'S DESIGNATION BY PRESIDENT GEISEL AS THE LATTER'S SUCCESSOR HAVE FOLLOWED PREDICATABLE LINES. MEMBERS OF THE BUSINESS/BUREAUCRATIC ELITE, WHO BY THE LARGE ARE LINKED TO THE REGIME IN POWER, WELCOMED THE DESIGNATION WITH ENTHUSIASM. LEFT-OF-CENTER INTELLECTUALS AND POLITICANS VIEWED THE PROCESS WITH CONSIDERABLE CYNICISM AND DOUBTS NOT ONLY ABOUT THE DEGREE TO WHICH GEISEL WILL PERMIT A POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION BUT ABOUT THE PERSONAL VIEWS OF GENERAL FIGUEIREDO IN VIEW OF THIS SNI BACKGROUND. MEMBERS OF THE MIDDLE CLASS APPEAR TO HAVE ACCEPTED THE DESIGNATION WITH RESIGNATION WHILE MILITARY OFFICERS IN THIS AREA HAVE BEEN VERY CAUTIOUS ABOUT VENTURING ANY OPINION AT ALL.

2. PRESIDENT GEISEL'S DESIGNATION OF GENERAL FIGUEIREDO AS HIS SUCCESSOR HAS ELICITED PREDICTABLE RESPONSES FROM VARIOUS SOCIO-ECONOMIC CLASSES IN THE NATION'S SECOND

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LARGEST CITY. THE FACT THAT THIS DESIGNATION HAS BEEN LONG EXPECTED--BY SOME EVER SINCE FIGUEIREDO'S NAME WAS FIRST LAUNCHED PUBLICLY BY GEISEL PROTEGE BARETTO IN JULY, AND BY MANY MORE FOLLOWING THE DISMISSAL OF ARMY MINISTER FROTA IN OCTOBER--MADE THE ACTUAL ANNOUNCEMENT SOMETHING OF AN ANTI-CLIMAX DESPITE THE ALMOST FEVERISH ACCOMPANIMENT BY THE NATIONAL PRESS OF EVENTS DURING THE FIRST

WEEK OF JANUARY LEADING UP TO GEISEL'S STATEMENT. AS VEJA MAGAZINE PUT IT THE PROCESS WAS SIMULTANEOUSLY BOTH THE MOST CLOSED AND THE MOST OPEN OF ANY TRANSFER OF POWER UNDER THE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENTS: CLOSED SINCE THERE WAS ONLY ONE VOTER; OPEN SINCE THE FREE PRESS HAD NAMED FIGUEIREDO PRIOR TO THE FORMAL ANNOUNCEMENT.

3. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE GLARING EXCEPTIONS TO GENERALLY PREVALENT REACTIONS AMONG IMPORTANT GROUPINGS IN RIO DE JANEIRO, OUR INITIAL SOUNDINGS INDICATE THE FOLLOWING:

4. PROMINENT MEMBERS OF THE BUSINESS/BUREAUCRATIC ELITE HAVE DEMONSTRATED MARKED ENTHUSIASM FOR THE DESIGNATION ALTHOUGH FEW ADMIT TO MUCH KNOWLEDGE, IF ANY, ABOUT THE PERSONAL VIEWS OF THE CANDIDATE, MUCH LESS ANY PERSONAL ACQUAINTANCE WITH FIGUEIREDO. IT IS GENERALLY ANTICIPATED THE FIGUEIREDO MIGHT BE MORE DISPOSED TO PRIVATE ENTERPRISE VIS-A-VIS STATE COMPANIES THAN GEISEL WHO, OF COURSE, CAME TO THE PRESIDENCY FROM THE ARCHETYPE STATE COMPANY, PETROBRAS. AT THE SAME TIME, THESE BUSINESS LEADERS OF THE BRAZILIAN ESTABLISHMENT PROFESS TO BELIEVE THAT FIGUEIREDO MIGHT VALUE THE US TIE MORE STRONGLY THAN GEISEL BASED ON WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS A MORE CONSERVATIVE INTERNATIONAL ORIENTATION THAN GEISEL. (THEY SUGGEST THAT FIGUEIREDO IS NOT LIKELY TO TOLERATE POLICIES SUCH AS SILVEIRA'S OPENING TO CHINA OR EASLY RECOGNITION OF CONFIDENTIAL

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THE MARXIST REGIME IN ANGOLA.) THE EUPHORIA ON THE PART OF MEMBERS OF THIS CLASS IS, OF COURSE, SELF-SERVING SINCE THEIR OWN PERSONAL PROSPECTS AS MEMBERS OF THE RULING ELITE ARE CLOSELY LINKED WITH THE REGIME IN POWER.

5. RIO INTELLECTUALS OF THE MEDIA AND OF THE PLITICAL CLASS VIEW THE DESIGNATION WITH A HIGH DEGREE OF CYNICISM. SOME HAVE EXPRESSED AN ALMOST SENTIMENTAL HOPE THAT SENATOR MAGALHAES PINTO WILL CONTINUE WHAT THEY VIEW AS HIS COURAGEOUS FIGHT FOR THE ARENA NOMINATION ALTHOUGH NONE CONSIDER HIS CHANCES FOR SUCCESS TO BE BETTER THAN REMOTE. OF CONCERN TO THIS GROUP ARE FIGUEIREDO'S POLITICAL BELIEFS RECALLING THAT HE SERVED IN SAO PAULO DURING THE WORST PERIOD OF SECURITY EXCESSES UNDER THE MEDICI REGIME; FIGUEIREDO'S CURRENT POSSITION AS SNI CHIEF ALSO WORRIES THESE BRAZILIAN LIBERALS. THEY HOPE THAT POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION AS PROMISED BY GEISEL WILL IN FACT TAKE PLACE DURING 1978 AND DURING THE FIGUEIREDO ADMINISTRATION, BUT MOST FEAR THAT LIBERALIZATION WILL BE ONLY COSMETIC AND IN ANY CASE SUBJECT TO REVERSAL AT THE WHIM OF THE MILITARY. THEY ALSO FRET AT THE PROSPECT OF ANOTHER SEVEN YEARS OF MILITARY RULE. IN

SUM, THEY LONG FOR RESTORATION OF FULL DEMOCRACY AND DOUBT THAT FIGUEIREDO SHARES THEIR DESIRE. THERE ARE IMPORTANT EXCEPTIONS TO THE ABOVE GENERALIZATION SUCH AS FORMER CHAMBER PRESIDENT CELIO BORJA, WHO SUPPORTS FIGUEIREDO DESPITE BORJA'S WELL-KNOWN PERSONAL LIBERAL POLITICAL CONVICTIONS.

6. THE MIDDLE CLASS APPEARS TO HAVE ACCEPTED THE NOMINATION WITHOUT ANY PARTICULAR ENTHUSIASM OR INDEED ANY REACTION BEYOND RESIGNATION. GALLUP POLLS HAVE INDICATED THAT THE MIDDLE CLASS (CLASS A) FAVORS SENATOR MAGALHAES PINTO OVER FIGUEIREDO BY A COMFORTABLE MARGIN, ALTHOUGH SUBSTANTIALLY LESS IN RIO DE JANEIRO THAN IN SAO PAULO. WE SUSPECT THAT THE SENATOR WOULD DO VERY WELL AMONG THIS

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GROUP IN A DIRECT ELECTION AGAINST FIGUEIREDO. AT THE SAME TIME, WE DETECT THAT MANY MIDDLE CLASS CARIOCAS, DESPITE A SENTIMENTAL YEARNING FOR A MORE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM, ARE COMFORTED THAT THE CONTINUITY OF THE MILITARY REGIMES, WHICH FIGUEIREDO'S DESIGNATION REPRESENTS, IMPLIES CONTINUING POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STABILITY.

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7. RIO POLITICIANS SUPPORTING EX-GOVERNOR CHAGAS FREITAS

ARE NOTORIOUS, AS IS THIER LEADER, FOR THEIR POLITICAL CYNICISM AND OPPORTUNISM. CHAGAS TOLD ME HE BELIEVES THAT FIGUEIREDO IS NOT ONLY THE BEST CHOICE, BUT WILL MAKE AN EXCELLENT PRESIDENT. (CHAGAS WILL PROBABLY DIVIDE THE KEY STATE INDIRECTLY ELECTED OFFICES WITH THE OTHER STATE MDB LEADER, SENATOR AMARAL PEIXOTO.) BY CONTRAST, AT LEAST ONE PROMINENT ARENA STATE POLITICIAN, STATE DEPUTY SANDRA CAVALCANTI, IS OPENLY BACKING SENATOR MAGALHASES PINTO. MODERATE MDB AND ARENA POLITICIANS ARE HOPEFUL THAT THE PROMISED POLITICAL OPENING WILL OCCUR AND VIEW 1978 AS PERHAPS A FINAL OPPORTUNITY FOR BRAZILIAN DEMOCRACY IN THE MEDIUM TERM.

8. THE MILITARY IN THE RIO AREA HAVE BEEN VERY GUARDED IN EXPRESSING ANY REACTIONS---A CAUTION UNDERSTANDABLE IN VIEW OF FROTA'S DISMISSAL, ABREU'S RESIGNATION AND A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF FIGUEIREDO'S BELIEFS AND INTENTIONS. GENERAL FRAGOMENI, NEW ESG COMMANDANT, HAS JOINED SEVERAL OF HIS FOUR-STAR COLLEAGUES IN PUBLICLY ENDORSING FIGUEIREDO BUT FIRST ARMY COMMANDER JOSE PINTO DE ARAUJO RABELLO HAS NOT AS YET COMMENTED. FIRST ARMY REPRESENTATIVES

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HAVE STATED THAT GENERAL JOSE PINTO WILL ONLY MAKE A STATEMENT IF CURRENT GRUMBLINGS FOCALIZE TO THE POINT OF CREATING DISUNION WITHIN THE MILITARY. THE NUMBER OF HTOSE MILITARY HAVING FORMER CONTACT WITH FIGUEIREDO ARE SOMEWHAT CAUTIOUS OF HIS EXPLOSIVE TEMPER. THIS, IN PART, EXPLAINS THE SLOW RATE OF ENDORSEMENT AMONG THE GENERAL OFFICER RANKS AS WELL AS THE FIRM CONVICTION THAT A FIGUEIREDO PRESIDENCY WILL VIRTUALLY END THE POLITICAL VOICE OF THE ARMY GENERALS. OTHERS WOULD WELCOME A "RETURN TO THE BARRACKS" AND SUPPORT FIGUEIREDO AS THE LEADER TO MOVE THE ARMY OUT OF THE LINE OF FIRE OF POLITICAL CRITICISM.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptoning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION, PUBLIC ATTITUDES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 jan 1978
Decapton Date: 01 jan 1960
Decapton Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978RIODE00243
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780025-0248
Format: TEL
From: RIO DE JANEIRO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780155/aaaabucb.tel
Line Count: 210
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 65cbcfe2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07 jul 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3762423
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: REACTION IN RIO TO DESIGNATION OF GENERAL FIGUEIREDO
TAGS: PINT, BR, (FIGUEIREDO, JOAO BAPTISTA DE O)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkvgwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/65cbcfe2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014